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SUBJECT: MEXICO ARMS TRAFFICKING: INFORMATION SHARING AND
BETTER INTERAGENCY COOPERATION THE KEY TO SUCCESS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Disrupting the flow of weapons into and throughout Mexico is the goal of the U.S.-Mexican bilateral arms trafficking implementation working group GC Armas. Our success will hinge on the joint collection of information on confiscated weapons together with the ability to trace weapons to their point of origin so that law enforcement officials can build cases against individuals acting in violation of U.S. or Mexican law. The biggest obstacle to our joint efforts with the Mexicans is the inability of leading law enforcement agencies here to work together.

The Right Mix of Players

¶2. (SBU) The U.S.-Mexican bilateral arms trafficking implementation working group replaced several pre-existing firearms groups. Known as GC Armas, the group was borne out of the Cuernavaca Arms Trafficking Conference in March 2009. Several U.S. agencies including the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the Defense Attach Office (DAO) are stakeholders in this effort together with their counterparts from the Mexican including the Mexican Federal Police (SSP), the Attorney General's Office (PGR) and the Mexican Army (SEDENA). Together, both sides are working to establish a set of guidelines and training classes for collecting, tracing, and storing weapons seized in connection to the commission of organized crime, as well as developing leads from intelligence derived from Mexican and U.S. arms seizures in order to identify arms trafficking networks and methods.

What Does Mexico Want?

¶3. (SBU) The GOM attaches much importance to the creation of a database that stores information on all weapons seized in Mexico and provides case management data for investigations and prosecutions. PGR CENAPI (Mexican Attorney General investigative branch) already collects information on confiscated weapons in its own database but that information is not shared systematically with the rest of the GOM or with the USG. Furthermore, the information captured is not always sufficient for effective judicial case development. Several GOM officials would like to develop a tracking system for weapons similar to OASSIS, which currently tracks people across the border. Investigators could use tracking information to ascertain sources of weapons (dealers or manufacturers), trafficking lanes (in and throughout Mexico), and end user information (organized crime data). U.S. law enforcement experts suspect that Mexican support for a database is based, in part, on the assumption

that it will help minimize the need for direct coordination between Mexican counterparts, and convey the illusion of cooperation.

What Can the U.S Provide?

¶4. (SBU) Tracing a confiscated weapon to its point of origin is important in order to understand trafficking routes and ascertain vendor, manufacturer, exporter, and/or importer malfeasance. The USG has offered to the GOM, E-trace, a weapons tracing system that tracks weapon sales to the last legal transaction. Because E-trace is an information upon demand system and not a true database, it only offers limited information to its users. PGR's CENAPI, the only Mexican agency that uses E-trace, can only view cases that either it or ATF generates. As such, its officials are unable to access information from other U.S. law enforcement subscribers without the assistance of a U.S. third party.

¶5. (SBU) ATF is in the process of developing a Spanish version of E-trace that it will make available to the GOM in December 2009. The Spanish version of E-trace will remain a request system that follows the same methodology as E-trace. However, programmers have expanded the list of input fields to seven, in large measure to satisfy the GOM's desire to collect and track more data.

¶6. (SBU) Separately, ICE provided to the GOM an information

MEXICO 00003108 002 OF 002

sharing portal, in Spanish, called Armas Cruzadas. This portal facilitates easy access to information on arms trafficking, investigations, and seizures. Armas Cruzadas, however, is not a U.S. weapons database that lends itself to tracing confiscated weapons. The intent of Armas Cruzadas is to create a virtual information exchange tool between the U.S. and Mexico.

Senior Leader Involvement Spurs Working Level Action

¶7. (SBU) At the Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) conference in San Antonio, TX, August 11-13, the USG and GOM signed a Letter of Intent (LOI), agreeing on the need for a Declaration of Principles. This document, currently under review by the GOM, outlines the kind of information on confiscated weapons that legal authorities require in order to prosecute criminals for arms trafficking in the U.S. and Mexico. On August 23-26, ATF Director Ken Melson, DHS Assistant Secretary John Morton, and DOJ Deputy Assistant Attorney Bruce Schwartz participated in high level meetings with GOM officials that made inroads towards the development of protocols for uniform information requirements and evidence sharing on seized firearms.

¶8. (SBU) Building on these senior level meetings, GC Armas hosted two conferences to further flesh out protocols that facilitate evidence sharing and foster greater understanding among local, state and federal USG authorities and their GOM counterparts. The first conference occurred September 22-26 in Phoenix, AZ. U.S. prosecutors and investigators were invited to participate in the working group and reviewed information requirements necessary for effective case development in the U.S. The second meeting was held in Tapachula, Chiapas, on Mexico's southern border with Guatemala and brought together prosecutors and investigators from Guatemala, Belize and El Salvador. The Tapachula conference (report at septel) focused on the challenges posed by illegal weapons' movements across Mexico's southern border and through its southern region and should help promote a consistent approach and a cohesive strategy on attacking the challenges posed by trafficking of firearms into Mexico.

¶9. (SBU) Comment. USG efforts to develop a more holistic approach when it comes to crime scene weapons forensics and

accountability will depend in large part on close inter-agency collaboration both within Mexico and among the countries in the region which are affected. GOM support for a comprehensive database is built on the pretext that it will improve SSP and PGR cooperation, without requiring either agency to overcome the differences that are undermining current efforts to respond to the problem of arms trafficking. We will continue to emphasize a task force approach that stresses cooperation as well as the use of databases as the best way forward. End Comment. Visit Mexico City's Classified Web Site at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/mexicocity> and the North American Partnership Blog at <http://www.intelink.gov/communities/state/nap/>

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